United Nations S/2018/750

Security Council

Distr.: General
31 July 2018

Original: English

Letter dated 30 July 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

In a letter dated 23 July 2018 addressed to me, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon requested that the Security Council extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of one year, without amendment. In that regard, and further to my report to the Council of 13 July 2018 on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2018/703), I hereby request that the Council consider the renewal of the mandate of UNIFIL, which is due to expire on 31 August 2018.

I commend the continued commitment of both the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces in maintaining the cessation of hostilities, as well as their close cooperation and coordination with UNIFIL. The continued period of relative calm and stability in southern Lebanon and along the Blue Line provides a window of opportunity for progress towards a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution to the conflict, as called for in resolution 1701 (2006).

At the same time, both parties have yet to fulfil their respective obligations under the resolution. Israel must withdraw its forces from Lebanese territory and cease violations of Lebanese airspace. The Government of Lebanon must exercise effective authority over all Lebanese territory, prevent hostile actions from its territory, ensure the safety and security of the civilian population, in addition to that of United Nations personnel, and ensure the disarmament of all armed groups so that there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State. The presence of unauthorized weapons outside of State control, coupled with bellicose rhetoric from both sides, heightens the risk of miscalculation and escalation into conflict.

UNIFIL, in line with its strategic priorities as confirmed in the 2017 strategic review (S/2017/202), and in close coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, continues to work with the parties in fulfilling those obligations and, in particular, to support the efforts of the Government of Lebanon to extend the authority of the State in southern Lebanon, including by increasing the capacity and presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

I continue to be encouraged by the steps that the Government of Lebanon has taken to reinforce the Lebanese Armed Forces and extend State authority south of the Litani River further to the adoption of Security Council resolution 2373 (2017), in which the Council called for "an effective and durable deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon and the territorial waters of Lebanon at an accelerated pace". These steps included the deployment in September 2017 of the

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Fifth Intervention Regiment, the inauguration in May 2018 of the Lebanese Armed Forces regional civil-military cooperation centre in the south, and steady progress in operationalizing the Lebanese Armed Forces model regiment, in addition to efforts to acquire an additional vessel for the Lebanese navy. The increased capacity and presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon has enabled further cooperation and coordinated activities between the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL, as called for in resolution 2373 (2017), including permanent and temporary checkpoints and counter-rocket-launching operations. It is significant that the Lebanese Armed Forces initiated coordinated foot patrols along the Blue Line, with 213 such patrols conducted in June 2018.

A strong, sustainable presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon is a vital element in enhancing State presence in southern Lebanon and in moving from the fragile cessation of hostilities to a permanent ceasefire. Such a presence is also an important demonstration of the commitment of Lebanon to resolution 1701 (2006). The United Nations is committed to enhancing its support for those efforts, including with respect to ensuring that there should be no unauthorized armed personnel, assets or weapons in the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River, bearing in mind the primary responsibility of the Lebanese Armed Forces in that regard. UNIFIL will continue to adapt its posture to ensure that it acts with all means available within its mandate and capabilities regarding the illegal presence of armed personnel, weapons or infrastructure.

I reiterate my call for further international support for the Lebanese Armed Forces, including within the framework of the International Support Group for Lebanon, building on the commitments made by the Government of Lebanon regarding the implementation of resolutions 1701 (2006) and 2373 (2017) during the "Rome II conference" held in March 2018.

In the absence of progress towards a permanent ceasefire, the ability of UNIFIL to deter, prevent and de-escalate the conflict remains of vital importance. The emphasis that UNIFIL places on prevention continues to be part and parcel of its operational and non-operational activities. By mitigating risks in a timely manner, UNIFIL continues to prevent small incidents from escalating into large-scale violence and to safeguard the cessation of hostilities. In that regard, the constructive liaison and coordination facilitated by UNIFIL with the parties, including through the tripartite mechanism, is critical in de-escalating tensions and building trust.

This has been especially important during periods of heightened tension in recent months on both sides of the Blue Line in response to certain developments, as elaborated in my reports on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2018/210 and S/2018/703). For example, a particularly tense situation over construction works carried out by the Israel Defense Forces in several areas south of the Blue Line was de-escalated in April 2018 through liaison efforts with the parties led by the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander.

The liaison and coordination arrangements, including the tripartite mechanism, continue to play a crucial role in maintaining stability. The tripartite forum has remained flexible, enabling the parties to discuss a wide range of issues, including practical arrangements on the ground to further stabilize the situation along the Blue Line. In this regard, UNIFIL has been facilitating discussions with the parties with a view to addressing contentious points along the Blue Line.

UNIFIL has taken a number of proactive steps to enhance the pace, visibility and effectiveness of its operations in accordance with resolution 2373 (2017). It has expanded foot patrols along the Blue Line and in villages where heavy vehicular movements are problematic, increased night patrols along the Blue Line, utilized air assets more effectively, including by increasing the number of operational flights,

such as reconnaissance of sensitive areas, and undertaken night flights to monitor wadis. Between August 2017 and May 2018, it increased its monthly operational activities from 13,362 to 14,871, with a 68 per cent increase in foot patrols and a 28 per cent increase in the average flight hours of reconnaissance air patrols. UNIFIL continues to look at ways to adjust its operations in an effort to ensure that it remains a credible, flexible and mobile force.

The freedom of movement of UNIFIL was generally respected, with exceptions detailed in my previous reports on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2017/964, S/2018/210 and S/2018/703). Each time its freedom of movement was restricted, UNIFIL took immediate action with the respective national and local authorities and the Lebanese Armed Forces to restore access, either by vehicle or on foot. Following several restrictions of movement in May 2018 (S/2018/703), UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces took steps to ensure that sites maintained by "Green Without Borders", situated in close proximity to the Blue Line, were accessed and monitored without hindrance. It is imperative that the freedom of movement of UNIFIL be fully respected and unimpeded within its area of operations.

The increased pace of operations and the more intrusive patrolling conducted in accordance with the implementation of resolution 2373 (2017) has not affected the relationship with the local population, which has remained largely positive. UNIFIL continued to identify and implement quick-impact projects to address the pressing needs of local communities, support the extension of State authority in the south and contribute to local acceptance of the presence of the Force in line with its strategic priorities.

UNIFIL also continued its engagement with the Lebanese Armed Forces to explore ways to conduct activities that would benefit local communities south of the Litani River. In this regard, the newly inaugurated Lebanese Armed Forces regional civil-military cooperation centre will be important as it is expected to strengthen cooperation between the Lebanese Armed Forces and communities across southern Lebanon, including in the field of emergency preparedness and civilian protection.

In January 2018, the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force completed its reconfiguration in line with the recommendations of the 2017 strategic review (S/2017/202). The Maritime Task Force, which currently comprises six vessels and has an authorized maximum number of personnel of 780, continues to support the Lebanese navy in carrying out maritime interdiction operations and joint training. By enabling a stable and safe maritime environment, the Maritime Task Force not only contributes to enhancing maritime trade, but also deters the use of Lebanese territorial waters for illicit purposes.

As at July 2018, the total number of military personnel stands at 10,426. The UNIFIL civilian component includes 235 international and 585 national staff. I am grateful to the 42 troop-contributing countries that comprise UNIFIL for their ongoing commitment. The deterrent effect of the presence and operations of UNIFIL, on land and at sea, continues to play a crucial role in maintaining stability in southern Lebanon and along the Blue Line. The UNIFIL presence is also key to creating an environment conducive to a political process in which a permanent ceasefire could be discussed. UNIFIL, in close coordination with the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, is ready to lend its full support to the parties in that process.

Regarding the financial aspects of UNIFIL, by its resolution 72/299 and decision 72/558, adopted on 5 July 2018, the General Assembly appropriated the amount of $474.4 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019. As at 16 July 2018, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNIFIL amounted to $56.2 million. Total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at that date amounted to

$2,072.2 million. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 30 April 2018, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 March 2018, in accordance with the quarterly schedule. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of the Force beyond 31 August 2018, the cost of maintaining UNIFIL would be limited to the amounts approved by the Assembly.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL, Major General Michael Beary, and to all the military and civilian personnel of UNIFIL, for the work they are carrying out in southern Lebanon and for their commitment to the service of peace.

I pay tribute to peacekeepers who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of peace and to all men and women who have served in UNIFIL since its inception 40 years ago.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the unified and steadfast support of the Security Council to UNIFIL and its mandated activities. With the above information in mind, I recommend that the Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of 12 months, until 31 August 2019.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**